

FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA, WEST PHILADELPHIA  
BRANCH  
(Free Library of Philadelphia, Walnut West Branch)  
201 South 40th Street  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia  
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6765  
*PA-6765*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA, WEST PHILADELPHIA BRANCH (Free Library of Philadelphia, Walnut West Branch)

HABS NO. PA- 6765

Location: 201 S. 40<sup>th</sup> Street at Walnut Street, (West) Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania. The library faces west-northwest toward low-scale retail shopping with an open green space to the rear.

Owner: The library is part of the Free Library of Philadelphia system and is owned by the City of Philadelphia.

Present Use: Branch library

Significance: Completed in 1906, the West Philadelphia Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia was the first of twenty-five branch libraries built through an endowment from industrialist-turned-philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. The impact of Carnegie's grant program on the development of public libraries cannot be overstated. He came of age in an era when libraries were rare, privately funded institutions and access was through subscription. Believing in the power of libraries to create an egalitarian society that favored hard work over social privilege by allowing equal access to knowledge, between 1886 and 1917 he provided forty million dollars for the construction of 1,679 libraries throughout the nation. The vast resources that he allotted to library research and construction contributed significantly to the development of the American Library as a building type. In addition, by insisting that municipalities supply a building site, books, and annual maintenance funds before bestowing grants Carnegie elevated libraries from the arena of private philanthropy to that of civic responsibility.

Philadelphia was the recipient of one of the largest Carnegie grants for library construction. Although the city was among the first to establish a free library system, it had no purpose-built structures prior to the Carnegie endowment. The branch libraries were built between 1905 and 1930, under the direction of the city appointed Carnegie Fund Committee, and designed by a "who's-who" of Philadelphia's architects. The twenty extant branch libraries remain as a remarkable intact and cohesive grouping, rivaled only by that of New York City, with fifty-seven.<sup>1</sup> The West Philadelphia Branch was the work of Clarence C. Zantzing. Likely as a result of its primacy, the library is somewhat more

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<sup>1</sup> Carnegie provided funding beginning in 1903 for thirty branch libraries, but with rising construction costs, only twenty-five could be built. Of Philadelphia's twenty-five libraries, four are no longer extant and a fifth (Frankford) has been greatly altered. Four others are no longer used as library buildings. In New York, fifty-seven were still standing, and fifty-four still operating as libraries as of the 1996 publication of *The Architecture of Literacy; The Carnegie Libraries of New York City* by Mary B. Dierickx. The next single largest grants for branch libraries were given to Cleveland (15), Baltimore (14), and Cincinnati (10).

sophisticated in design and materials than later branches; it has terra cotta facing and exhibits elements of the French Renaissance style rather than the almost-formulaic understated brick construction and Beaux Arts styling that came to define Carnegie Libraries both in Philadelphia and nationwide. The lot on which the library was constructed was donated by local citizen and library enthusiast Clarence H. Clark.

Historian: Catherine C. Lavoie

## PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The West Philadelphia Branch was erected in 1905-06, as indicated by the cornerstone (1905) and the minutes of the Carnegie Fund Committee. The site was acquired by donation and the selection of the architect, Clarence C. Zantzinger, was approved by the Library Board in April 1904; by late July Zantzinger had billed for his design work.<sup>2</sup> Preliminary designs were ready for distribution to "invited" contractors for bids on 22 September, and a closing date was set for 4 October.<sup>3</sup> The cornerstone was laid on 25 April 1905.<sup>4</sup> The building was complete and ready to "turn over to the Trustees" of the Free Library on 26 June 1906.<sup>5</sup> The local paper reported that at the opening ceremonies, "C. L. Borie made the presentation speech on behalf of Clarence C. Zantzinger, who is ill, and who with Mr. Borie planned the building."

2. Architect: The library design is credited to architect Clarence Clark Zantzinger (1872-1954), who likely received assistance from C.L. Borie. Zantzinger formed a partnership with Charles Louis Borie, Jr. shortly after accepting the West Philadelphia Branch library project, and from 1905 through 1950 they worked together.<sup>6</sup> Zantzinger's French Renaissance-style design for the library reflects the eclecticism of the period as well as the design preferences of the firm. They later became known for their Collegiate Gothic designs, although the firm turned towards more modern forms in later years. They designed a mix of residential, ecclesiastic, commercial, academic, and civic structures. Designs for which the firm is most noted include the Moderne-style Fidelity Mutual Life Insurance Building, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art (with Horace Trumbauer), both on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, and the Gothic-style Protestant Episcopal Divinity School in West Philadelphia.

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<sup>2</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Minute Book, Vol. 1, minutes for 9 April 1904 and 29 July 1904.

<sup>3</sup> "Another Carnegie Library; Builders Have Plans for Branch in West Philadelphia," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 September 1904. The contractors that were invited to bid included: William R. Dougherty, Hen[?] & Company, Limited; Thomas M. Seeds, Appleton & Burrell, Harry Brockle-[?] J. Sims Wilson, Thomas Little & [?] Ashton S. Tourison.

<sup>4</sup> "Cornerstone of Library Laid" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 26 April 1905.

<sup>5</sup> "Beautiful New Carnegie Library Turned Over to Trustees by Builders" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 June 1906.

<sup>6</sup> They were joined in 1910 by Milton B. Medary, after which time the firm was known as Zantzinger, Borie & Medary. Following the latter's death in 1929, the partnership returned to Zantzinger & Borie.

Clarence Zantzinger was a highly trained individual, particularly when considering that many of his generation received the bulk of their architectural training by apprenticing with a practicing architect rather than in the classroom. Zantzinger first received a civil engineering degree from Yale's Sheffield Scientific School in 1892. In 1895 he earned a degree in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania and then completed his architectural training with two years at the Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris, graduating in 1901. He returned to his native Philadelphia and set up his own architectural practice, taking on as a partner C. L. Borie, Jr. in 1905. In 1910, Milton B. Medary joined the firm, working with them until his death in 1929. Prior to joining the firm, Medary worked with architect Richard L. Field to design the Spring Garden Branch of the Free Library, built in 1907. Likewise, Charles Borie later designed the South Philadelphia Branch, built in 1914. Zantzinger joined the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 1903, and was made a fellow in 1911. He served as president of the local Philadelphia chapter of the AIA, and at the national level, served on the Committee on Foreign Relations and Education. Other local professional and civic involvements include membership in the T-Square Club, the Society of Colonial Wars, the Sons of the Revolution, the Masonic Order, the Philadelphia Art Alliance, the National Capitol Parks and Planning Commission, and the City Parks Association in Philadelphia for which he served as president.

3. Owners: The library is part of the Free Library of Philadelphia system and is owned by the City of Philadelphia. The land for the library was donated by private citizen Clarence H. Clarke.<sup>7</sup> Donation was the typical means through which the lots for Carnegie funded libraries were acquired, at least in the early years of their development. Later in the branch library building campaign, the City of Philadelphia was called upon to provide sites, often taken from within parks or other recreation facilities it already owned in order to complete the building program and round out the distribution of libraries throughout the city. Mr. Clark was described as "a lover of books and the owner of one of the finest private libraries in the country."<sup>8</sup>

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: William R. Dougherty's construction bid was approved within a week of the 4 October deadline, as noted within the minutes of the Carnegie Fund Committee on 11 October 1904. Dougherty's bid of \$49,000 included construction in terra cotta, despite discussion by the Committee of alternative materials consisting of either "white cement" or brick.<sup>9</sup> The total construction budget, including architect's fee, heating and electrical contracts, furniture, etc., was \$70,000. Despite lower bids, the contract for the terra cotta work was awarded to Conkling-Armstrong Company at the request of the John Thomson, Librarian of the Free Library and Secretary of the

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<sup>7</sup> "Handsome West Philadelphia Branch erected on ground given by Clarence H. Clarke, formally opened" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 June 1906. According to the article, "The building is the first of 30 which will be erected with the sum of \$1,500,000...majority of them ... in the Kensington and Frankford districts."

<sup>8</sup> Ltr. From the President of the bd., April 1906, *Tenth Annual Report, 1905*. The letter mentioned death of Clarence Clark, who donated the land for the West Philadelphia Branch, as "himself a lover of books and the owner of one of the finest private libraries in the country . . ."

<sup>9</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minutes, 9 September 1904.

Committee.<sup>10</sup> In November 1904, Mr. Reid was hired as employee of the Free Library to act as inspector/clerk of the works for West Philadelphia Branch construction.<sup>11</sup>

In April 1905, Committee member Clarence Sears Kates made a report suggesting that the heating and ventilation of the libraries could be achieved at a substantial cost savings if a “definitive plan” was created that could be applied to all the libraries. The discussion included a debate over the use of central heating plants versus internal systems. Towards that end, in May 1905 Richard Gilpin was appointed as consulting engineer in all matters relating to the heating, lighting, and ventilation of the branch libraries. By late September a “memorandum of instruction to architects to be followed by them in all Branch Library Buildings” was developed. The plan called for steam coils to be placed underneath the bookcases that lined the walls, with the same system to be used in the lecture hall and other rooms (although the basement lecture room was to be “treated individually”), and the walls were to be built with vents large enough to accommodate the installation of an indirect system of heating and ventilation if deemed necessary at a latter date.<sup>12</sup>

5. Original plans and construction: The architect’s plans for the building, published in *The Brickbuilder* in May 1906, called for a single story structure on a raised basement. The slightly elevated first story was reached via an entry vestibule in which was located a short flight of stairs. The interior consisted of an open plan with a circulation desk positioned near the front entry at the center of the large reading room which was separated by low shelving into flanking reference and children’s book sections. The plan for the raised basement included a separate entrance to the north end for easy access to the auditorium. The basement “lobby” contained a steamboat style stairway, with openings that fed into the auditorium to the center and to either side. The auditorium had a platform at the eastern end and beyond it were located utility rooms, including central boiler rooms flanked by rooms housing in one, a coal bin, and in the other, a fan.<sup>13</sup> Missing from the published plans but reported in the newspaper in September 1904 were rest rooms and other facilities. According to the article,

Plans for another Carnegie Library for the city, the West Philadelphia branch, to be erected at the southeast corner of Fortieth and Walnut streets, were sent to builders for proposals yesterday, to be submitted by October 4. The drawings were prepared by Architect C.C. Zantzinger in the French Renaissance style of architecture. They provide for a one-story basement structure, with a frontage on Walnut Street of 59 feet and of 133 feet on Fortieth Street. A granite basement was provided for, and the superstructure will either be of brick or terra cotta. The basement will contain a large auditorium, lobby, fan and boiler room, while on the main floor the reading room, children’s room and reference room will be located. A coat and lunch room, pantry, and toilet rooms will be fitted up on the mezzanine floor.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 25 November 1904.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 20 April 1905, 5 May 1905, 29 September 1905.

<sup>13</sup> “Carnegie Branch Library, West Philadelphia.” *The Brickbuilder*, Vol. 15, No. 5, May 1906, plates 67 & 68.

<sup>14</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 September 1904.

Neither the plans nor latter photographic evidence suggest that a mezzanine level was ever built.

The interior program included elaborate, classically styled details such as pilasters, bracketed cornice, and frieze panels with figures clad in togas many of whom are mounted on horseback. The ceiling was lit by a series of three skylights interspersed by plain panels containing heating vents. Chandeliers in a circular formation with glass globes hung from the ceiling. Book shelves lined the walls, at the tops of which were mounted scones with globes.<sup>15</sup> A long debate had been waged with regard to the exterior building material, whether it be of brick and stone, or brick and terra cotta; the latter option won out.<sup>16</sup>

6. Alterations and additions: The interior of the library has been greatly altered through the process of two separate renovations, the first in 1959-60, and more recently, in 2001. The 1959-60 renovations were part of a larger movement to modernize all of the Free Library's facilities, designed by the Philadelphia Department of Public Property, Architecture and Engineering section. In most cases, this resulted in new flooring, lighting, furniture, and upgraded mechanical systems. The strongest impact of this campaign was upon the Frankford and West Philadelphia branches where the interiors were virtually gutted to create a Modernist design. During the 1959-60 renovation many of the library's architectural details were removed to create a more Modern-style interior by architects Martin, Stewart & Noble. The ornamental friezes, said to have been in deteriorating condition, were removed and a drop ceiling was added, hiding the cornice, skylight, and original ceiling. The hanging light fixtures were also removed in favor of florescent lights inset in the ceiling panels. The original wood shelving and the furnishings were replaced with stark metal pieces, and the paneled entryway and circulation desk were removed. The low shelving was arranged longitudinally to create three separate sections.

The changes to the exterior of West Philadelphia were far less severe, having been restricted to the northern end along Walnut Street where the full-height glass wall and new main entry were added. Prior to the change, this wall contain two bays, each consisting of a tripartite window as seen on the front elevation. A wide, open stairwell led to the basement entrance, demarcated by a low wall with an ornamental light standard. The entire center section below the cornice, including the two bays, was removed and replaced with large panels of plate glass with an entrance to the center. Aluminum railings were added to both the exterior entry and the interior stair lobby now visible from the outside. This became the principal entry. According to a Press Release issued at the time of the library's reopening, the "renovations cost[ing] \$200,000, have

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<sup>15</sup> Interior photograph by William H. Rau of Philadelphia appears in the Annual Report of the Library Board, 1906.

<sup>16</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, Board of Trustees, Minutes, 1 July 1904 – "on motion resolved, that the matter of procuring plans and securing bids be referred to the Carnegie Fund Committee with power" . . . to consider West Philadelphia plans in detail "after long debate referred to CFC with power to act" material should be brick and stone or brick and terra cotta but not stucco. Steps from 40<sup>th</sup> Street in main library room ran too far into the building and suggested that square steps would be better than the 2 semi-circular stairs leading to the Lecture Room."

completely transformed the old building into a modern structure worthy of the community.” The opening was held on Monday, February 8, 1960 at 1:00pm.

The most recent renovation was largely the result of flooding problems in the basement that lead to the closure of the library in 1997. Designed by architect Joseph Powell, it entailed a number of significant changes that somewhat ironically resulted in the undoing of the previous 1959-60 changes. The greatest changes included the reorientation of the main entry to its original location, the replacement of the glass wall with a two-story bay window, the raising of the main floor, and the removal of the ceiling to expose the roof structure. The library is now entered from the basement level, the first floor having been raised and the stairs in the entry vestibule having been removed. The circulation desk and turnstiles are here, and the main reading room is now entered via a stairway to the rear of the building. An elevator has also been added at this location. An open gallery now overlooks the circulation desk and bisects the main reading room. The original skylights were removed and the roof structure exposed, allowing for more overhead space. Decorative friezes with classical figures were also removed, as were the pilasters that framed them. Only the bracketed cornice remains of the original wall and ceiling treatment.

## B. Historical Context:

### **The Carnegie Funded Free Library of Philadelphia Building Campaign**

On 3 January 1903, Carnegie’s secretary James Bertram responded to the Free Library of Philadelphia’s request for a grant to finance the construction of libraries with the promise of \$1.5 million for a planned thirty branch libraries. Despite the fact that Philadelphia figures quite prominently on the timeline of American Library history, it had no purpose-built public libraries prior to the Carnegie endowment. Philadelphia *did* have the nation’s first private subscription library, known as the Library Company, founded in 1731. Numerous other private libraries were created as well, such as the Mercantile Library, Ridgeway Library, and the library at the University of Pennsylvania. And it was in Philadelphia that the American Library Association was formed in 1876. The establishment of the Free Library in 1891 placed Philadelphia among the first American cities to institute a non-subscription public library system for the benefit of all of Philadelphia’s citizens. As Library Board president J.G. Rosengarten stated in 1903, “Proprietary libraries have grown into valuable adjuncts to our other education institutions. None of them, however, serves the public as does the Free Library, providing good reading for our school children, for our industrious adult population, and for the city’s useful employees, firemen, and telegraph operators.”<sup>17</sup> As Rosengarten’s comment indicates, the library system was an important component of the city’s public education.

However, prior to the Carnegie funding, the city’s fourteen branch libraries, each started by interested local communities, were dependent upon old mansions, storefronts, or back rooms of commercial buildings and civic institutions for library space. As Rosengarten points out, “The [Carnegie] gift gave welcome relief from the expense of the rented rooms occupied by the

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<sup>17</sup> Theodore Wesley Koch, *A Book of Carnegie Libraries* (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1917), 85.

branches, and from much of the risk to which the collections were subjected in these temporary quarters.”<sup>18</sup> Likewise, prior to the completion of its permanent home in 1927, the Central Branch of the Free Library was housed within three different preexisting buildings, including City Hall, an abandoned concert hall on Chestnut Street, and a building on the northeast corner of 13<sup>th</sup> and Locust streets. Carnegie’s \$1.5 million grant would change all that. Beginning in 1905, the endowment was put to work, paying for the design and construction of twenty-five branch libraries throughout the city (three of which are no longer extant). They were built between 1905 and 1930, with the bulk of them constructed by 1917, and designed by a wide range of Philadelphia architects.

Philadelphia was just one of many cities to receive a library grant. Andrew Carnegie provided forty million dollars for the construction of over 1,600 libraries throughout the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and about 400 more abroad). Carnegie was motivated by both his own immigrant experience and by his social/political beliefs. Despite his poor, working-class upbringing, he made a fortune through the production of steel. Believing that the wealthy were obligated to give back to society, Carnegie set out to spend during his lifetime the entire 400 million dollars that he received through the sale of Carnegie Steel Company. Carnegie also believed that given a good work ethic and the proper tools, anyone could be successful. He was self-taught and credited his success to the access he received to one gentleman’s private library. Carnegie came to believe in the power of libraries to create an egalitarian society that favored hard work over social privilege. Hence libraries, as a key to learning and socialization, became a focus of his charitable donations.

While Carnegie’s motivations were in large part paternalistic, the impact of his library campaign is far greater than merely providing the working class with access to books. The vast resources that he applied to this area led to great advances in library science as well as to the development of the American Library as a building type. Carnegie applied the corporate business models that had made him successful as an industrialist to the development and production of libraries. He insured that local municipalities had a stake in their libraries by insisting that they supply the building site and the books, as well as ten percent of the total construction cost annually for maintenance. By so doing, Carnegie took libraries from the arena of private philanthropy to that of civic responsibility. Any town that was willing to meet those terms was basically able to receive grant funding. The process began via a letter of application submitted to Andrew Carnegie’s personal secretary and the individual charged with management of the library grants, James Bertram. In 1903, the city of Philadelphia did just that.

Unlike its rival New York City, Philadelphia’s planning group, the Carnegie Fund Committee, placed librarians and not architects at the forefront of the planning process. This is likely the primary reason for the relative standardization of Philadelphia’s branch libraries, particularly with regard to layout. This important decision on the part of the Library Board was in keeping with the sentiments endorsed by the Carnegie Corporation. James Bertram was generally distrustful of architects as library planners, believing that they tended to make libraries too expensive by adding unusable space and superfluous detail merely for affect. He preferred the advice of librarians who better understood how libraries needed to function. Both the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



Philadelphia Library Board and Carnegie Fund Committee included Pennsylvania State Librarian and American Library Association representative Thomas L. Montgomery, and the librarian of the Free Library, John Thomson. President of the Board of Education Henry R. Edmunds was also on the Committee, an indication of the significance of the libraries to public education in Philadelphia. Prominent local businessmen and attorneys filled the other positions. As the Committee minutes indicate, the Librarian and Assistant Librarian were left to work out the details with the architects, and generally had the last say when it came to finalizing the plans.<sup>19</sup> (For more information about the Carnegie Library construction program and the Free Library of Philadelphia's own library building campaign see, Free Library of Philadelphia, Central Branch, HABS No. PA-6749, Historical Context section.)

### **The West Philadelphia Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia**

As with most of the early branches of the Free Library of Philadelphia, the original West Philadelphia Branch opened in a preexisting structure before Andrew Carnegie's endowment provided funding a purpose-built library. It first opened within the West Philadelphia Institute (at 40<sup>th</sup> and Ludlow streets) on 28 May 1895, just four years after the establishment of the Free Library. Six years later, almost to the day, the library moved to the Hamilton School at 4105-09 Chestnut Street.<sup>20</sup> Because the Carnegie Corporation insisted that a building lot and an annual funding level of 10 percent of the initial construction cost be provided by the municipality, community support was crucial to library construction. The lot was provided by local resident Clarence H. Clarke, who unfortunately died just months before the formal opening of the new building. The books also had to be provided by the municipality or by the local community. While many commented about the irony of providing for a library without books, the Carnegie Corporation felt that the volumes included in each library should reflect the demographics of the area. In fact, they would later insist upon community surveys to insure that the occupational and ethnic backgrounds of the residents were accommodated by the available reading material. At the time that the West Philadelphia Branch opened, the local paper reported that donated funds had provided for 20,000 volumes with space for that many more.<sup>21</sup> In the same article it was stated, "The building is the first of 30 which will be erected with the sum of \$1,500,000 . . . the majority of them . . . in the Kensington and Frankford districts." The total cost was reported to be \$80,000, which amounted to \$10,000 over the initial budget.

Architectural plans were developed by local architect C.C. Zantzinger, beginning in the spring of 1904. Bills from the architect recorded in the minutes of the Carnegie Fund Committee in July

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<sup>19</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, Board of Trustees, Minutes, 1 July 1904. "On motion resolved, that the matter of procuring plans and securing bids be referred to the Carnegie Fund Committee with power." And also, Carnegie Fund Committee Minutes, 17 May 1912. An entry from this meeting (one of many) illustrates that practices: "Mr. Richards [architect] be instructed to prepare plans for the proposed new Paschalville Branch and that the President be authorized to approve plans for such Branch when same were agreed upon by himself, the Librarian, Asst. Librarian and the architect."

<sup>20</sup> Walnut West Branch Library, Clippings file, handwritten notes.

<sup>21</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 June 1906.

and November suggest a timeframe for the progression of the architectural plans.<sup>22</sup> According to an article that appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in October, prior to the construction of the library,

The West Philadelphia Library was planned by Architect C.C. Zantzinger, after the French Renaissance style of architecture. The drawings provide for a one-story basement structure with a frontage on Walnut Street of 59 feet and 133 feet on Fortieth Street. A granite base is provided for, and the superstructure will either be of brick or terra cotta. The basement will contain a large auditorium, lobby, fan and boiler room, while on the main floor the reading room, children's room and reference room will be located. A coat and lunch room, pantry and toilet rooms will be fitted up on the mezzanine floor.<sup>23</sup>

Zantzinger was asked by the Committee to invite bids "from no more than ten builders" for the construction of the library in September 1904.<sup>24</sup> By that fall, contractor William Dougherty was selected based on his low-bid proposal. The cornerstone was laid on 25 April 1905, almost exactly one year after the selection of the architect. The local press raved about the beauty and grace of the newly completed building, which "follows classical lines." According to the article, this was the first building in the city to be built entirely of terra cotta. The claim was also made that the building "Differs from all others – one large room instead of being cut up into different departments."<sup>25</sup> The reference to "all others" is interesting, considering that this library would greatly resemble in plan and general configuration most of the next twenty-four libraries to be erected by the Free Library, and is therefore likely a reference to prevailing library plans of the day. The open plan was based on the latest in library science. It was the result of a long-overdue collaboration between architects and librarians, the research for which was funded by the Carnegie Corporation. Through Secretary James Bertram, the Carnegie Corporation eventually would insist upon such a layout. Construction of the West Philadelphia Branch began in haste, as the building used to house the library collection had been sold and would need to be vacated by mid-July, a seemingly impossible deadline.<sup>26</sup>

The West Philadelphia Branch opened on 26 July 1906, the first of the Carnegie branches to be completed. It was a race to the finish with three other branches then under construction vying for first. According to the Committee minutes for 16 June, the West Philadelphia Branch was scheduled to open "as soon as the maintenance ordinance is signed by the Mayor. The Frankford

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<sup>22</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minutes, 29 July 1904, the minutes indicate that a bill was received from Zantzinger for work on West Philadelphia for \$750. The minutes for 25 November 1904, indicate that another payment was made to Zantzinger for \$1001.46.

<sup>23</sup> "Will Bid Upon Two Carnegie Branches," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 October 1904.

<sup>24</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minutes, 9 September 1904, report on discussion with Mr. Borie [Zantzinger's partner], resolve to "adhere to decision" that West Philadelphia not be built of white cement, to building to be erected as heretofore directed of brick or terra cotta. Also motion that Zantzinger invite bids from no more than ten builders for West Philadelphia. It was further decided to get estimates for indirect heating for Lehigh and direct for West Philadelphia "with pipes behind the book cases."

<sup>25</sup> "Beautiful New Carnegie Library Turned Over to Trustees by Builders" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 June 1906.

<sup>26</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minutes, *Ninth Annual Report*, April 1905, "Mr. Zantzinger was appointed architect . . . plans were duly prepared and approved, and the contract for the building was awarded to Mr. William R. Dougherty. Ground was broken and the cornerstone laid April 26, 1905. . . every effort will be made to secure the opening as much as the Hamilton House, now used for West Philadelphia has been sold to the West Philadelphia Republican Club . . . library can remain in the building until July 15 . . . it has been much hindered by a strike amongst the tone masons."

Branch was scheduled to open the second or third week of September, the Lehigh Avenue Branch, the second week of October, and the Tacony Branch, the first week in December.” In actuality, the Lehigh Branch would be the next to open. The ceremonies were recorded in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* the following day, announcing the “handsome” West Philadelphia Branch as the first of thirty to be erected. According to the article, the library opened “with brilliant exercises, in which nearly a score of well-know Philadelphia participated,” including addresses from the president of the Board of Trustee for the Free Library, Joseph G. Rosengarten; the President of the Board of Education, Henry R. Edmunds; and by John Thomson, the Librarian of the Free Library.<sup>27</sup> The total cost for completion amounted to \$80,000. According to the article, “There is but one room on the main floor with subdivisions for juvenile and reference purposes. In the basement is located a kitchen and a lunchroom for the employees. The interior is of a Classic design with numerous frescoes of Renaissance work.”<sup>28</sup> It would remain as one of the more distinctive and elaborate of the Philadelphia branch library designs.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The building was erected with facades of terra cotta and designed in the French Renaissance style, both features of which are unique to the Free Library of Philadelphia’s branch libraries. Most of the branches are built of brick and exhibit traits of the then-popular Beaux Arts style. West Philadelphia Branch does, however, maintain the symmetry created by the other branch buildings. It also exhibits the open plan that came to define Philadelphia’s branch libraries, although it does not include the centrally located rear ell to create a T-shaped configuration as would most of the other branches built after it. The terra cotta ornamentation includes playful library references such as the row of books spines in elements of the frieze and the hand offering a book that appears in the cartouche over the door. The integrity of the exterior has been largely maintained, with the exception of the north end wall. The interior, however, has been greatly altered, although a few of the ornamental finishes such as the cornice remain.

2. Condition of fabric: The building was closed and its future was once threatened due to water damage that undermined both its decorative plasterwork and its structural stability. Through the lobbying efforts of preservationists and the local community, however, the building was saved and extensively renovated beginning in 2001. It is now in good condition.

### B. Description of Exterior:

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<sup>27</sup> “Handsomeness West Philadelphia Branch erected on ground given by Clarence H. Clarke, formally opened” *Inquirer*, 27 June 1906.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

1. Overall dimensions: The building has a rectangular configuration, measuring 133' by 59', and an open interior plan. Originally built as a one-story structure on a raised basement, the building is now entered from the street level with the main reading room located on the second story. The library is five bays across the front façade, with the principal entry to the center. The windows were raised above the doorway to accommodate the book shelves. There are no windows or other openings to the south side or the east rear. A large, two-story bay window has been recently added to the north side. There is also a side entry to the west of the bay. The tripartite windows include spandrels and together they rise from the water table to the frieze. Blind recesses appear to either side of the front entry and at the northwest and northeast corners of the building. Above these panels are the decorative elements of the frieze, which appear as a row of books punctuated by flanking oversize, incised dentils. The doorway is set in a low-arched opening, above which is a tripartite window, and above that, a large cartouche. The terra cotta treatment terminates beyond the western corner of the library's front facade, leaving the southwest side and southeast rear of the library with a plain stucco treatment, suggesting it was anticipated that other buildings would later abut it.

On the raised principal floor there is an open gallery to center of the main reading room that bisects the space. The circulation desk is located at the ground (former basement) level. There is a stairway and an elevator to rear of building. The entrance lobby and circulation desk now occupies the space formerly used as the basement lecture hall.

2. Foundations: The exterior foundation is of gray granite.

3. Walls: The walls are of terra cotta formed to resemble ashlar blocks and decorative elements, and the building is set on a gray granite base. The tripartite windows are offset by blind recesses and spandrels. A classical balustrade runs along the roof line, forming the uppermost portion of the wall.

4. Structural systems, framing: It is likely that the building has structural steel supports that provide the framework for its masonry façade.

5. Porches, stoops: A few steps, with low walls to either side, form an entry stoop.

6. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The principal doorway is to the center of the west façade. The frontispiece includes a low round-arched opening with a panel in which it is inscribed "Free Library of Philadelphia, West Philadelphia Branch" and draped with a garland. Above this sits a tripartite window with an architrave surround surmounted by a large ornamental cartouche set just under the frieze.

b. Windows and shutters: The typical window is a tripartite arrangement, the center portion of which contains five-by-two lights, with five-by-one lights to either side. Only the bottom-most lights are operable. The windows are set in a

slight recess and there is a raised-panel spandrel below. Round-arch basement windows appear beneath each bay on the front façade, but have been filled in with stone. There are no windows on the eastern end wall, and the minutes of the Carnegie Fund Committee suggest that it was intended as a party wall, although no building exists there today.<sup>29</sup>

#### 8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The building appears to have a flat roof, and originally accommodated a series of three skylights. The interior of the building currently reveals a low gabled roof with the timbers exposed and a single boxed skylight to the center.
- b. Cornice, eaves: There is a dentiled cornice and a decorative frieze, which appear as a row of books punctuated by flanking oversized incised dentils. Above the cornice a classically styled balustrade runs around the edge of the roof line.

#### C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The library is entered at the street or raised basement level where there is a circulation desk and turnstile, elevator and stair lobby, meeting, utility and restrooms. The second story is a large open space that contains the main reading room separated into two sections by a large open gallery above which is located a skylight. To the center of the reading room the open well looks down to the circulation desk at the main entry, and the ceiling has been removed to expose the roof trusses and to create the illusion of more space.
2. Stairways: There is a modern, open metal stairway to the center of the rear wall.
3. Flooring: The floors are wood.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are of new plaster that replaces the original plaster. The ornamental frescos that once appeared in panels positioned between the window openings have been removed. However, the bracketed cornice that encircled the reading room is still extant.
5. Openings: Tripartite windows still light the interior, raised to accommodate the interior shelving. There are no windows on the southwest end and southeast rear walls.
6. Mechanical equipment:

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<sup>29</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minutes, 25 November 1904. Final decision to eliminate windows from the design was recorded 13 January 1904.

a. Heating: The original coal fired steam heat boiler was replaced and the current system includes gas heat and central air conditioning. Heat registers are located above and below the built-in book stacks.

b. Lighting: Half-dome opaque white glass light fixtures hang from the ceiling along the center and two flanking areas (with the exception of those sections that house the skylights). They replace the three original brass chandeliers, and the sconces mounted on the bookcases.

c. Plumbing: The library includes restroom and kitchen facilities in the basement.

D. Site: The library sits on the corner of 40<sup>th</sup> and Walnut streets in a busy urban environment of mostly low-scale commercial structures. However, there is a small park to the rear that provides an open green space and enhances the overall civic quality of the site. There are a few trees towards the western end of the front façade, along the sidewalk, and a large planter provides for small-scale plantings at the northern corner of the building.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

#### A. Architectural drawings:

Carnegie Branch Library, West Philadelphia, *The Brickbuilder*, Vo. 15, No. 5, May 1906, plates 67 & 68. Article includes floor plans and an elevation of the front façade.

#### B. Early views:

Free Library of Philadelphia, *Annual Report, 1906* (Municipal Reference Division, Cities P53-1154). Includes photographs taken upon completion of the library by William H. Rau, photographer. The two views include a perspective of the exterior front and side elevation (where the entry to the lecture hall was located), and an interior view taken from the southeastern corner of the room looking towards the front entry to show a general view of the interior space.

Free Library of Philadelphia, Central Branch; vertical files for the West Philadelphia Branch Library include views taken during the 1959-61 renovations showing before and after views. Most significant is the depiction of the new side wall with glazed panels and street level entry, and the closed-in former front entry. Interior views are more striking, depicting a space that is totally unrecognizable from the original to include a dropped ceiling and streamlined modern shelving and furniture.

#### C. Bibliography:

1. Primary sources: The records of the Free Library of Philadelphia are located at the Central Library on Vine Street. The *Annual Reports* are located in the Municipal

Reference Division, Cities P53-1154; and the Carnegie Fund Committee Minute Books are located in the Director's Vault (access by special permission).

Free Library of Philadelphia, Board of Trustees, Minutes, 1904.

*Ibid.*, *Ninth Annual Report*, 1905.

*Ibid.*, *Tenth Annual Report*, 1906

*Ibid.*, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minute Book, Vol. 1, 1904.

## 2. Secondary sources:

"Another Carnegie Library; Builders Have Plans for Branch in West Philadelphia," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 September 1904.

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Walnut Street/West Branch Library, Clippings file, handwritten notes.

"Will Bid Upon Two Carnegie Branches," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 October 1904.

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the West Philadelphia Branch Library was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the Heritage Documentation Programs of the National Park Service, Richard O'Connor, Chief during summer 2007 as part of a larger initiative to record the Carnegie Funded branch libraries of the Free Library of Philadelphia. The project is sponsored by HABS in cooperation with the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, John A. Gallery, director; and the Free Library of Philadelphia, William J. Fleming, Administrative Services Director, and made possible through a Congressional appropriation for recording in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The historical reports were prepared by Lisa P. Davidson and Catherine C. Lavoie. Large-format photography was undertaken for HABS by Joseph Elliott. Measured drawings were prepared of the Thomas Holme Branch as the typical branch library during the summer 2008. The drawings team was led by Robert Arzola, working with Jason McNatt, Paul Davidson, and Ann Kidd, architectural technicians.